

Landowner Perception of the Deer Herd

This section addresses the objective to better understand landowners' perception of the deer herd on their land. In particular, the section considers landowners' perception of the deer herd on their land prior to CWD and any sightings of sick or unhealthy looking deer.

Changes in the Deer Herd Prior to the Discovery of CWD

Overall, landowners feel that prior to the discovery of CWD in Wisconsin, the number of deer on their land was relatively stable in numbers, or increasing slightly. On a scale of 1 to 9, where 1 represents "definitely decreasing", 5 represents "relatively stable", and 9 represents "definitely increasing", the mean response was 5.8.

Figure 2 illustrates that most landowners believe that prior to the discovery of CWD, the deer population on their land was remaining stable or perhaps increasing. More than one-half (55%) of the landowners believe the deer population on their land was fairly stable; more than one-third (35%) say the deer population on their land was increasing; and about one landowner in ten (10%) believes the deer population on his/her land was decreasing (Figure 2).

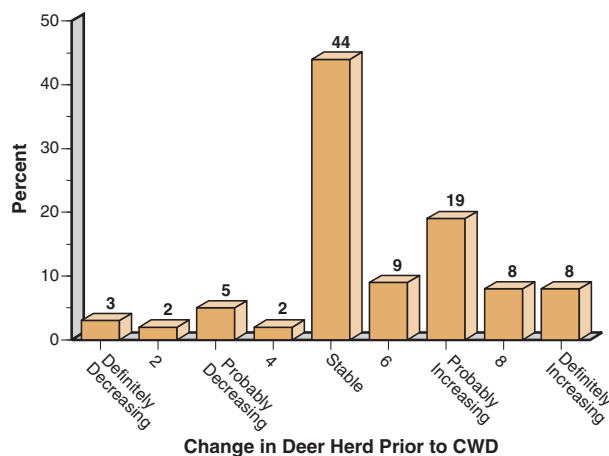


Figure 2. Perception of deer population on land prior to CWD.

Deer Herd Target Population Prior to the Discovery of CWD

Landowners also believe that prior to the discovery of CWD in Wisconsin, deer numbers on their land were about right or needed to be reduced slightly. On a scale of 1 to 9, where 1 represents "definitely needed to be reduced", 5 represents "was about right", and 9 represents "definitely needed to be increased", the mean response was 4.2 (Figure 3). When grouped together, Figures 2 and 3 suggest that landowners were predominantly satisfied with the size of the deer herd on their land prior to CWD.

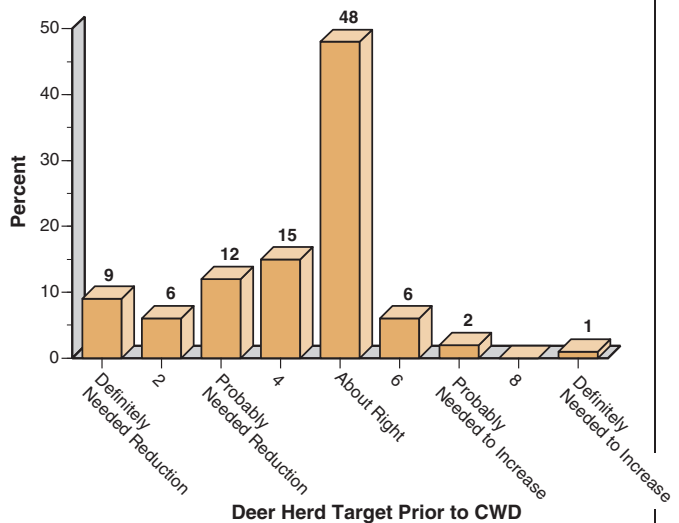


Figure 3. Deer herd target population prior to CWD.

Figure 3 shows that a majority of landowners say the deer population on their land prior to the discovery of CWD was at a proper level. Seven in ten (70%) landowners believe the deer population on their land "was about right"; more than one-fourth (27%) of the landowners say the deer population on their land needed to be reduced; and fewer than one landowner in 20 (3%) say the deer population on his/her land needed to increase (Figure 3).

Focus group participants offered numerous comments about an excessive deer population.

I'm not against reducing the deer herd. I don't think that chronic wasting disease is the excuse or reason for doing it. I think there are just too many deer.

We got right around 60 to 70 deer off the farm in the last year and a half, and we still have too many because of adjacent landowners not participating [in hunting].

We have 350 acres. We have too many deer. We've worked pretty hard at reducing the heard. We got a ways to go yet.

I'm not a hunter. I couldn't shoot a deer but we've got a lot of them. I've hit a few with a car, but I think there are too many and I'd like to work with you any way possible.

I do not hunt but I have a lot of people that like to hunt. I'm very interested in getting rid of more of these deer, although I think you've done a pretty good job around there right now. It's a lot better than it was.

I called the DNR and said that if they have the equivalent of a SWAT team that they could just come and camp on my land and take them out.

The following comments illustrate the ecological benefits of a reduced deer herd as seen by two landowners.

I've been talking for years about how you don't see any high woods – you don't see oak and maple that's over 15-20 years old. And when you start seeing things like that you'll know that we have the deer shot down the way they should be...I was just talking about how the trilliums and the ferns have come back. Where I live deer packed it down. Now they're coming back.

Our family is enjoying deer season as much or more as we ever have in the past and we've seen tremendous positive results in the forests and our land and believe me, the only thing that land

grows is deer and trees. And for a long time it wasn't growing trees. And now we're growing trees. We've got young oak trees where we haven't had any for 20 years. We've got young oak trees. We've got wildflowers that I used to count on one hand that I'd see specimens of that flower blooming in our woods, and now we've got all kinds of wildflowers. So it's not the end of deer hunting and it's not the end of the world.

Sick/Unhealthy Deer Sightings

Very few landowners have seen deer they thought looked sick or unhealthy.

Table 9. Percent of landowners that have seen sick or unhealthy looking deer on their land.

Sighted Sick or Unhealthy Deer?	Percent
Yes	4
No	94
Unsure	2

Table 9 indicates that nearly all landowners say that they had not seen any deer on their land that they would describe as being sick or unhealthy-looking during the first nine months of 2004. More than nine landowners in ten (94%) have not seen any sick or unhealthy looking deer and four percent of the landowners say they had seen sick or unhealthy looking during the first nine months of 2004.

Please note that there was no statistically measurable difference between the responses given by hunters and non-hunters.

The following comment illustrates the difficulty some landowners may have accepting CWD as a serious wildlife disease.

One of the things that I'm concerned about is how big of a problem is this really? This wasted deer problem. I've never seen a wasted deer in the 35 years that I've been here. I've seen lame deer, deer with broken legs, but I've never seen a deer that's wasted. How many of the deer that have been slaughtered over the past two years would actually qualify as a wasted deer?